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LAKE CHARLES MAN SENTENCED TO 99 YEARS IMPRISONMENT FOR DRUG TRAFFICKING AND USING A FIREARM

20-year old to spend best years of his life in federal prison

Project Safe Neighborhoods Still Combating Gun Violence

Lake Charles, Louisiana . . . United States Attorney Donald W. Washington and ATF Special Agent in Charge David G. Harper announced that JUSTIN STERLING, age 20, from Lake Charles, Louisiana was sentenced last week to **99 years federal imprisonment to be followed by 5 years supervised release** by United States District Judge Patricia Minaldi for possession with distribution of cocaine base, intent to distribute cocaine base, and possession of a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking crime. A three-day jury trial in January 2006 ended with STERLING being convicted of all counts.

STERLING was indicted in April 2005 following an investigation by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, the Westlake Police Department, and the Calcasieu Parish Sheriff's Office. Officers with the Westlake Police Department responded to a complaint of attempted robbery in

January 2005 to find that STERLING and another person had a dispute over a drug exchange. During the dispute, STERLING discharged a firearm and wounded the other person. STERLING fled the scene. In March 2005, deputies with the Calcasieu Parish Sheriff's Office responded to a complaint of a possible drug transaction. Arriving at the scene, they found STERLING in possession of a Lorcin semiautomatic pistol and ammunition. Later that month, deputies with the Calcasieu Parish Sheriff's Office went to STERLING'S home to execute an arrest warrant and found the defendant asleep on the couch. Under STERLING was a semiautomatic pistol.

Later, during a video tape recorded statement, STERLING claimed he bought the firearms to protect himself during illegal drug trafficking.

This case was prosecuted by the United States Attorney's Office as part of Project Safe Neighborhoods. Project Safe Neighborhoods is a nationwide program begun in 2001, and designed to reduce violence in our communities by aggressively using existing federal firearms laws. United States Attorneys, District Attorneys, Sheriffs, Police Chiefs, and state officials have created partnerships to address crimes involving firearms. Generally, any arrest involving a firearm is reviewed immediately by local, state and federal authorities to decide whether the case is best suited for prosecution under state or federal law, or a combination of both. Project Safe Neighborhoods is expected to lead to longer prison terms for violent criminals, and a significant reduction in violent crime. To date, federal prosecutions under Project Safe Neighborhoods in the Western District of Louisiana have led to the incarceration of criminals responsible for violent crimes such as homicides, aggravated assaults, robbery, car jacking, burglary, and drug trafficking.

Sentencing in federal court is determined by the discretion of federal judges and the governing statute. Parole has been abolished in the federal system.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Brett L. Grayson.

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